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LESSON LEARNED

Crisis Communications: Organizing Guided Media Tours of Incident Sites

SUMMARY

Incident commanders should consider providing the media with limited, guided tours of incident scenes as appropriate. These tours can enhance the quality and accuracy of media reporting without compromising site security or safety.

DESCRIPTION

Following the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City, media representatives complained that their ability to report on search and rescue activities diminished when the effort progressed into the remnants of the building. Several media organizations mistakenly reported a slowing or stoppage of search and rescue activities, since, from their vantage point, it was unclear if these activities were ongoing.

Public information officers provided a small group of journalists with a guided tour inside the building to counter these inaccurate reports. Journalists participating in the tour were required to share any footage taken with the other media organizations not included in the tour and were given clear rules on what was not appropriate to broadcast or publish.

Incident managers may have security concerns about granting media personnel access to an incident site. However, by offering a limited group of media representatives controlled access, incident managers can balance site security with public information needs.

CITATION

Catherine Manzi, Michael Powers, and Kristina Zetterlund, *Critical Information Flows in the Alfred P. Murrah Bombing: A Case Study*. Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, 2002.

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